

existing programs, such as TWIC, and identify approaches on how biometrics can enhance protections for secure and sterile areas of the airport. TSA is also required by this bill to provide Congress and airport operators with a breakdown on best practices for using biometrics to improve airport security.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is not about re-inventing the wheel or putting a stop to any good work at TSA on this issue. It is about encouraging public-private partnerships and promoting an open dialogue between TSA, industry, and Congress on how best to secure our airports. I am proud to support this important and timely legislation, and I encourage my colleagues to join me in so doing.

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY).

Mrs. LOWEY. I wanted to rise to thank our chairman for your important work on this issue. We have worked together on 100 percent screening of workers at airports, and now, there is a pilot project in place for seven of those airports, and we know that in three they are doing 100 percent screening. And at the others, they're looking at other methods, and one of the methods that they are seriously considering and some are using are the issue of biometrics because it is so important.

So I do want to thank the chairman for your leadership on this issue, and I look forward to following the work of the seven airports. Hopefully, we'll be able to spread it to all of our airports.

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, again, in closing, I rise in support of H.R. 5982, the BEAR Act, the Biometric Enhancement for Airport-Risk Reduction Act, brought to us by the chairman of this committee. This is an advancement. This is a push to where we need to go with respect to biometrics.

We ought to understand that the United States is the leader in the world in technology and technology application. We need to do that here as well. And it sometimes seems strange that we don't take advantage of the leadership that we have in applying it to certain areas. The urgency that we need to adopt with respect to the threat that is out there is, I think, shared by this committee, but I'm not sure that it is shared totally by the full Congress, nor by the Federal establishment all together nor, in some cases, by the American people, where, after our successes in forestalling any major terrorist attack on our shores since 9/11, it allows us a certain relaxation that I think is dangerous. The gentleman moves us in the right direction with this bill.

I might say that as we move with this bill I would hope we would move with some other bills on this floor dealing with the threat that we have to our national economy and our national security through our energy dependence on many, many others.

The U.S. is the leader in the potential for oil shale, just as we're the leader in technology in this world. The U.S. might be called the Saudi Arabia of oil shale. According to the Department of Energy, this Nation is endowed with more than 2 trillion barrels of oil. To put this figure in perspective, the world has used 1 trillion barrels of oil since the first oil well was successfully drilled in Pennsylvania in 1859. According to the Department of Energy, let me repeat, we are endowed with more than 2 trillion barrels of oil, and we're talking about U.S. oil shale.

The problem is that we had a rider on an appropriations bill just last year that makes this huge domestic resource off-limits. That would be as silly as us having a bill on the floor that would say, even though we're the leader in biometric technology, we will prohibit its use in the area of airport security. That would make no sense, Mr. Speaker, nor does it make sense for us not to utilize this tremendous resource we have.

So again, Mr. Speaker, I would say that I would encourage all Members to support H.R. 5982, the Biometric Enhancement for Airport-Risk Reduction Act, otherwise known as the BEAR Act, brought to us on this floor by the distinguished gentleman from Mississippi, the chairman of our committee.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support this commonsense approach to studying how biometrics can be used to improve airport security.

I think it is important to make clear again, this bill does not create any new mandates on airports. This bill does not require airports to use biometric identifying systems. Instead, it only provides for a study of how biometrics could be used.

I strongly believe that strategic deployment of biometrics in the airport is a sensible part of any layered security plan for the airport environment. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation and make our airports safer.

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5982, Chairman THOMPSON's legislation that would take an important step toward improving airport security.

Since 9/11, Congress and the airline industry have taken strong actions to tighten security at our nation's airports.

These measures have included the creation of the TSA, the expansion of the air marshal service, and the full screening of airline passengers.

Chairman THOMPSON's proposal before us today would build upon these early efforts by implementing a study on the use of biometrics in identifying airport workers.

As TSA continues to look for ways to ensure that airport workers—in addition to passengers—do not pose security risks, pursuing biometrics is a timely and necessary effort.

At the same time, pursuing biometrics would also enhance efforts to conduct 100 percent screening of airport workers with access to secure parts of an airport.

Congresswoman NITA LOWEY and I have long supported 100 percent screening of airport workers.

Earlier in this Congress, we were proud to introduce and pass H.R. 1413, a bill to establish a pilot program to test such worker screening at a number of airports.

Just recently, TSA launched a pilot similar to the program outlined in our bill, and I look forward to learning the results of this important test upon its completion.

Of course, no one wants more bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake, but Congress needs to look continuously for ways to improve protection for the traveling public.

As 9/11 so painfully taught us, we must resolve our security weaknesses before terrorists exploit the remaining gaps.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5982.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5982, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Ms. Wanda Evans, one of his secretaries.

#### CATCHING OPERATIONAL VULNERABILITIES BY ENSURING RANDOM TESTING ACT OF 2008

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5909) to amend the Aviation and Transportation Security Act to prohibit advance notice to certain individuals, including security screeners, of covert testing of security screening procedures for the purpose of enhancing transportation security at airports, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5909

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

*This Act may be cited as the "Catching Operational Vulnerabilities by Ensuring Random Testing Act of 2008" or the "COVERT Act of 2008".*

#### SEC. 2. PROHIBITION OF ADVANCE NOTICE OF COVERT TESTING TO SECURITY SCREENERS.

*Section 111 of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (Public Law 107-71; 49 U.S.C. 44935 note) is amended—*

*(1) by striking the section enumerator and heading and inserting the following:*